

# THE RY OF INDIA

E. LUCIA TURNBULL



THE STORY OF INDIA



ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND PORUS.

# THE STORY OF INDIA

BY  
E. LUCIA TURNBULL

## BOOK I

WITH COLOURED FRONTISPIECE  
AND OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO., LTD.  
6 OLD COURT HOUSE STREET, CALCUTTA  
53 NICOL ROAD, BOMBAY  
364 MOUNT ROAD, MADRAS  
LONDON, NEW YORK, TORONTO

1932

## PREFACE

IN this book we are going to learn about the good that men through the ages have brought to the making of India as she is to-day, and to forget, so far as we can, the bad. And so there will not be much in it about battles or strife of any kind. And we shall say as little as possible about bloodshed and those early tyrants from the north, who swept down upon the land bringing as much misery as plague or famine. Like a pestilence they came, destroying what they could, and went back to where they came from. We will try to forget all about them until that time comes when we must learn who they were and whence they came, to fit them into their place in the great march of Indian history. We have no room for them in any case; we want it all for talk

of better things, such as the beautiful buildings and gardens that the Mogul Emperors left behind them, and all the practical benefits that came with the men from the West.

And in learning all about this we shall begin to see India with new eyes, not as a land crushed by centuries of strife and oppression, but as the home of culture and the scene of progress.



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## CHAPTER I

### A LOOK AT THE MAP OF INDIA

BEFORE we can really understand the history of India we must take a look at the map. We shall see that it is shaped like a triangle upside down. Like a triangle, too, it has no fourth side. The east and west coast come together in a point, and are bounded by the sea; on the west by the Arabian Sea; on the east by the waters of the Bay of Bengal. There is no southern boundary. To the north, India is shut off from Tibet by the snowy range of the Himalaya mountains, of which Mount Everest is the highest peak in the world.



At a first glance it seems as if there were no way of getting into India by land, but by looking more closely at the map, small gaps in the great wall of mountains can be seen on the north-west. These gaps are called passes, and through them the first invaders came.

The Himalayas are not only a mighty wall which protects India on the north; they give her the great rivers which water her two chief plains—those of the Indus and the Ganges. Without the Indus the whole of Sind would be a desert; without the five rivers which flow into the Indus the Punjab would not be one of the richest provinces in India; without the Ganges the great plain of Northern India would not be what it is—one of the most fertile parts of the world. The Ganges, and the large rivers which flow into it, also make a fine waterway; people can travel up and down them for hundreds of miles, and goods can be carried from up-country to the sea. Before railways were built.

goods and passengers travelled, slowly but safely, by the great river. The rivers, too, give their chief supply of water just when the thirsty plains need it most—in the hot weather. For then the snows of the Himalayas begin to melt and flow down to enrich the land. It is no wonder then, that the Ganges is a sacred river; the lives of millions depend upon her waters.

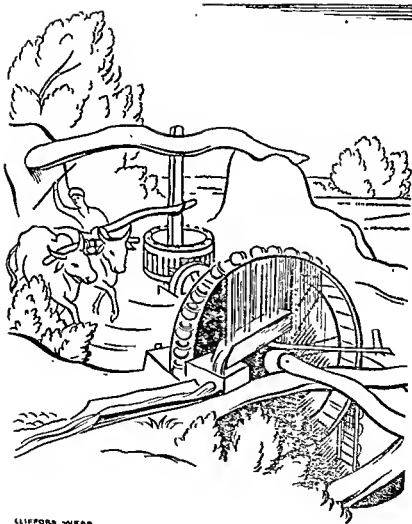
Another glance at the map will show us that the Vindhya hills and the Narbada river (which is almost as sacred as the Ganges) divide India roughly into two parts. To the south of them lies the Deccan. It is what is called a "tableland," but its surface is not level like the great plains of the north. for some of it is quite hilly. The line of the Vindhyas, with its forest and 'jungle, made it difficult in olden days to pass from Northern into Southern India. And so, when we read Indian history, we find that for many centuries the history of the north and that of the south are distinct.

Nowadays railways run from north to south, and the Vindhya are no longer a barrier.

In every country the kind of life that the people live depends largely on the climate and the nature of the land. India is no exception to this rule. Everywhere her sun is warm, and her broad plains are usually fertile. So, through the ages, India has been mainly an agricultural country—one in which most of the people cultivate the land, or in some way depend upon the land for their living.

Agriculture cannot go on without water, and so we find the largest number of people in those parts of India which always have plenty of water. The rivers of Northern India are fed from the unfailing snows of the Himalayas, and can be used for irrigation. So the Ganges valley (where the soil is also rich) is very populous.

In those districts where the rainfall is very small—such as Sind, Rajputana, and parts of the Punjab—the land can support only a few people, unless



it is irrigated by canals. In Eastern Bengal, which has plenty of water, a square mile of land supports ten times as many people as a square mile in Rajputana.

In Sind and the Punjab there are great irrigation works which are adding millions of acres to the land on which crops can be grown. So population there grows too. But there are parts of India where the rainfall is small, and where irrigation from canals or large reservoirs is impossible. In those parts population is likely to remain small.

Many parts of India depend for their water upon the monsoon, or upon monsoon rain which can be stored in tanks or wells against the dry season. Unfortunately the monsoon sometimes fails, or gives less rain than usual, and the result in those areas is either scarcity or famine. We have records of famines from quite early days. Before railways were built not much could be done to help the starving people, but now Government

can use the railways to bring food for men and fodder for beasts to any area as soon as famine threatens. Government has learned what is the best way to fight a famine, and a regular plan of campaign is ready, to be used at need. It is, in its way, like a plan drawn up before a war breaks out. A great famine, in which millions die, should therefore never occur again.

## CHAPTER II

### THE COMING OF THE ARYANS

THE first invaders of India about whom anything is known are the Aryans. These were a people



who lived somewhere to the north-west of India, but set out to find a new home.

Some of them crossed the Hindu Kush, and after resting for a while in the country now called Afghanistan, made their way through the famous Khyber Pass.

The land through which they passed was dry and stony. The rainfall was scanty, and the rivers had dried up. They wanted green pastures and water for their flocks and herds, and so they moved by degrees towards the land where the mighty river Indus watered the rich plain of the Punjab.

And here the Aryans came, mounted on their



horses and driving their herds of cattle before them. And with them came men who sang sacred poems and hymns. They could not write, but each one taught his son what he had heard his father say or sing. This was how the Rig Veda began; that wonderful collection which is the most holy book of



Hindu India to-day. And from the Rig Veda we learn what manner of people the Aryans were.

It is from the Rig Veda, too, that we learn something about the people whom the Aryans found living there when they arrived in India. They were very different from the invaders, who called them Dasas or Dasyus. They had darker skins, broader faces, and flatter noses than the Aryans, who were a fair-skinned race with thin noses and well-cut features.

There is no real evidence that they were savages, or less civilized than the Aryans.

It was only after a long struggle that they were turned out of the Punjab. The new-comers had brought horses with them, which the Dasyus did not use, and so the Aryans could move with greater speed in battle. This was a great advantage to the Aryans, and possibly gave them the victory.

Having conquered the Punjab, the Aryans gradually pushed their rule farther to the east; but

beyond the Punjab they did not drive out the old inhabitants. As they moved on they founded Aryan villages, where they settled down and became good farmers. They grew wheat, and counted their wealth by the number of their cattle. Bows and arrows were their chief weapons. Chariots, each carrying a driver and a fighting man, were used in battle, and the warriors wore armour. They had weavers, too, who made their clothes, and metal-workers who made beautiful things from gold, and swords and spears from bronze. But iron they did not use.

The Aryans were fond of dancing and music, and of fighting among themselves. But they forgot their private quarrels in a common war upon the dark-skinned Indians, whose lands they seized and whom they despised.

The Gods of the Aryans were the powers of nature; the heavens, the sun and the earth, day and night, twilight and dawn, storm and sunshine, the

wind and the rain. They gave each of these spirits fine-sounding names, and so we learn that the god of the sky was called Varuna; Indra was the god of thunder, and was also worshipped as the warrior god. Then there was Surya, the glowing god of the sun, and Agni the god of fire, whom the Aryans held in deep veneration, and who still remains sacred to the Hindus. These were the chief of the Aryan gods, with one other, Soma, the god of the sacred drink made from the Soma plant, gathered by moonlight.

In later times the name "Soma" was given to the moon. The Aryans worshipped thirty-three gods, and in the Rig Veda the following verse is found:

"Gods who are eleven in earth, who are eleven dwelling in glory in mid-air, and who are eleven in heaven, may ye be pleased with this our sacrifice."

The Aryans made offerings of the flesh of animals, melted butter, and the juice of the sacred Soma plant. In return they expected the favour of



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the gods. They believed that these gods were kindly, true, and never deceitful. They punished the wicked, but were always ready to give help to those who deserved it.

In appearance they were beautiful and splendid, and drove through the air in golden cars drawn by swift horses or other animals. Indra, the god of thunder, sometimes rode on an elephant, and Soma was drawn by a deer. The finest chariot of all was that of Surya, the sun god, who wore a helmet shaped like the rays of the sun.

Perhaps the most adorable of all the Aryan gods were the twin brothers known as "Asvins" ("The Horsemen"). At that mysterious hour between dawn and sunrise they were supposed to appear. The Asvins were the children of heaven, and were never seen apart. They rode through the air in a golden car drawn by horses with wings, or else by great birds. Their car moved so swiftly that in one day it had travelled round both heaven and

earth. The Asvins were always young, and yet as old as the world. They were bright and beautiful, and wore garlands of lotus flowers. The path they followed was as golden as that of the sun god himself. The Asvins were so wise that they had the power to make old men young again, and blind men see. In the Rig Veda they are called "lovers of sweetness, wondrous and true."

There is a story told of how all the gods competed in a race, the prize for which was the lovely daughter of the sun. She had been promised by her father to Soma, but there was great rivalry in heaven as to who should win her as his bride.

Among the suitors came the powerful Indra, god of the thunderstorm, whose weapon was a thunderbolt. His car was drawn by two splendid horses, tawny in colour like the hair and beard of the god. The destroyer of demons and god of battle, Indra gazed proudly upon his rivals, as if the race was already won and the prize his. Agni, the

flame-haired god of fire, returned the haughty look of Indra, and showed his golden teeth. Wise and terrible, this god knew everything. Glowing like a red sunset he came, flying his banner of crimson smoke; a fit mate for the daughter of the sun. But Soma, to whom she was already promised, came driving up, his sharp weapons grasped in his hand. His car was as bright as the moonlight, under which the plant sacred to his name was gathered. In attendance upon him were the Maruts, the storm gods, three times sixty of them, each one of them armed with a spear of lightning. Each wore a mantle and a helmet of gold, and as they drove up in their gleaming cars their song filled the air like the wind before a storm.

The race was run, but not one of the gods could overtake the glorious twin brothers, the Asvins. The prize was theirs, and in triumph they carried off the daughter of the sun.

For a thousand years after their arrival in India

we know very little of the history of the Aryans. They left no inscriptions or coins behind them, no writings or monuments. No traveller from other countries speaks of having seen them, and no trace of them is left, except their religious hymns and a few others which have come down to us in the Rig Veda.

Although they may be the earliest ancestors of the Hindus, many of their customs and beliefs are very different from anything that history tells us of Hindu customs and beliefs. They did not hold the life of animals as sacred, and although, even when they came to India, they were divided into tribes, we do not know that they had any caste system. It may be that they mingled with the people whom they found living in India when they arrived, and fell in with some of their ways. As the ages went by, the gods of the early Aryans were replaced by others, but the name and memory of the Aryans will live as long as India lives, for they were a fine and brave people.



### CHAPTER III

#### INDIA'S TWO GREAT BOOKS

Two of the world's greatest books belong to India; the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Stories such as they tell will never be found again, because the times in which they happened have long since passed away.

As we read the history of India we shall learn that for a very long time it is all about the people who were descended from the Aryans or from the inhabitants whom the Aryans found living in Hindustan when they arrived there. And so it comes about that both the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, which belong to those far-off times, describe manners and customs of the ancient Indians.



At the time when these two great books were written no invaders except the Aryans had ventured across the Hindu Kush. Many hundreds of years had still to pass away before the first Moslem set foot on Indian soil; many hundreds more before ships brought the first men from the West to trade in spices and precious stones.

Perhaps that is why the Mahabharata and the Ramayana mean so much more to Hindu boys and girls than they can ever mean to those of other races who have made their home in India. Two thousand years or more have brought great changes to everything but the heart of India. That remains the same, and still beats high to stories of the bright Arjuna and his lovely bride Draupadi, or of Sita and her little sons, who in exile learned from Valmiki, the Brahman sage, the deeds of their father Rama. These boys, Kusa and Lavi, were the first children of India to listen to the Ramayana.

THE MAHABHARATA is said to be written by

Krishna Dwaipayana, who went by the name of Vyasa, or "the fitter together." In eighteen books, making up two hundred and twenty thousand long lines, he tells the stories of the great men and women of his time. If it were not for these wonderful legends we should have nothing from which to make pictures for ourselves of what ancient India was like. The Mahabharata is the greatest of all endeavours to keep alive the memory of old Hindu beliefs and customs, just as it is still the wisest book of all. There is a saying in use in Bengal that "Whatever is not in the Mahabharata is not found in the land of Bharata (India)."

THE RAMAYANA was written by a Brahmin called Valmiki, who lived at the same time and in the same century as his hero Rama. We have seen how he was the companion of Rama's sons. It was Valmiki who gave poor faithful Sita a refuge when she was forced to become a wanderer in the forest.

First by the wayside died Queen Draupadi; her fault had been too great a love for the bright Arjuna; next Sahadeva, who admitted no equal to himself; then Nakula, whose admiration of his own beauty was his sin; then Arjuna, for he had boasted, "In one day I could destroy all my enemies," and he had failed; then Bhima, who cursed a fallen foe. So King Yudhishthira toiled on alone. And as he went, thinking his sad thoughts, his dress of bark torn and dusty, Indra himself appeared in his flaming chariot and bade the king enter beside him. But the king said, "Unless my brothers and our queen can enter heaven also, I will remain outside."

Then the god replied gently, "Your brothers and the Queen Draupadi are already there."

This made the king glad, and he was about to step into Indra's faithful chariot when he remembered his faithful dog. "O Indra!" he cried, "I cannot enter heaven unless my dog goes too."

But to this Indra could not agree, and he asked the king to send away his dog, for it could not be allowed to pass the gates of heaven.

"Then I will not pass them either," said the king, "for to cast off one who has loved me would be sinful."

In vain Indra pleaded that the dog was an impure animal; that even its very look would soil heaven.

"Return then, and leave me here," said Yudhishtira, "for I have never yet broken faith with the timid or the devoted, with such as have come to me for shelter, or begged for mercy, or been too weak to protect themselves. Not for all the joys of heaven would I leave my dog behind."

Once more Indra tried to shake the king's resolve, but Yudhishtira cried out in a firm voice, "I will not leave the dog outside the gates of heaven!" Then he turned to go, and there stood the dog, not in his humble earthly shape, but

The Ramayana is not so long as the Mahabharata. It has only ninety-six thousand lines, which are divided into seven books. It must have been composed after the Mahabharata, because the people it describes are more advanced than those in the older book.

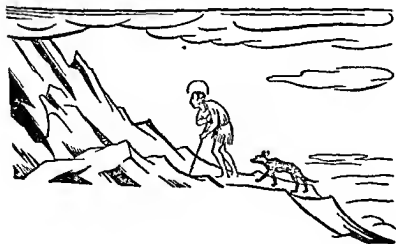
There is no story in either the Mahabharata or the Ramayana that the Hindu child does not know by heart. The very smallest, those who can only just toddle, laugh with glee at the name of Rama or Sita, or hide their faces in their mother's breast with fear when the wicked demon Ravana is mentioned. But these stories seem always fresh, even when heard many times, and so if we read two of them again in this very book we shall not find them stale or dull. For great things heard again do not lose their size. Beautiful things, seen many times, remain beautiful. And even if one already knows the end of a story, if it is a splendid end, it will bear repeating many times.

## A STORY FROM THE MAHABHARATA

### *How King Yudhishtira came to the Gates of Heaven with his Dog*

The king was weary; the great mountain had been hard to climb, and he was all alone, except for his faithful dog who followed close behind him.

Of all those whom he had loved, and who had set out with him from Hastinapura, not one remained. Their sins had prevented them from reaching the gates of the heavenly city of Mount Meru.





changed into a shining god, Dharma himself, the God of Righteousness. Then from the hosts of heaven rose a great song of praise for the king who had been willing to sacrifice his chance of heaven for the poor dumb animal who loved him.

And so at last King Yudhishthira, seated beside Indra in his chariot, entered in his mortal shape the highest heaven.

This is only one of the many beautiful stories which fill the pages of the Mahabharata. We shall now see how, in quite a different way, the love of animals is taught us in the Ramayana.

#### A STORY FROM THE RAMAYANA

##### *How King Dasharatha Died*

King Dasharatha lay dying of grief for his exiled son Rama. And by his side sat Rama's mother, Kaushalya. Seeing that there was something on

the mind of the king other than the loss of Rama, she begged him to speak of it and ease his heavy heart.

"It is just this that torments me, and will not let me die in peace," said Dasharatha with a heavy sigh.

"Once, long ago, I committed a sin. I did not mean to, but all the same the sin remains with me. It was when I was young and first reigned over Ayodhya. I loved the chase, and was so skilful with the bow that it was said I could bring down a deer aiming by sound alone. This was before the days when you and I were wed, Kaushalya. Nay, do not weep until my tale is done. It was the time when the first rain had cooled the ground after long days of burning heat.

"From the new pools, left by the heavy rain, the sound of the frogs rejoicing joined the gay voice of the peacock. A wind, rough as a playful child, shook all the tree-tops, and the hills were hidden in

mist. On such a day, my own heart as light as the pleasant air, I went out to hunt in the forest. My steps led me down by the bank of the river Sarayu. Here all was still, except for the rush of the stream over stones where the water is shallow. And here, just a little weary, I rested."

"Did you sleep?" asked Kaushalya, fearing the rest of the tale.

"No," said the king. "What hunter sleeps if game may be near? I watched and I waited. And suddenly, down far beneath me, where the banks of the river were low and the water ran clear over sand, I heard a strange noise, like an elephant gently roaring, or the sound of a jar being filled. I fitted an arrow, and shot it towards the place from which the sound came. It was dusk, and my eyes could not follow the flight of the arrow. But, alas for my skill, it went home. I heard cries and deep groans. I had hit not a deer but a boy. By the bank there I found him; his eyes were already



quite misty with death, but he told me that his parents were hermits, and blind. He was all that they had in the world, and now he was dying, poor Sindhu, the boy who had done me no harm. I wept as I knelt there beside him, and begged of him to ask me a boon, even if it were half my kingdom. He smiled, his weary eyelids lifted over eyes dark with pain, and then he said :

“ ‘ O King, do not weep. All things must some day die. I do not mind, if only my poor blind parents may be told that I have not forgotten to draw their water for their evening meal.’ ”

“ Then I promised the poor boy that I would care for his parents as if they were my own, and once again I asked him if there was something I could do for him. I told him that it would help me to bear the memory of my sin.

“ His voice was weaker as he answered me, but he smiled very sweetly, saying :

“ ‘ Since I was born I have lived in this forest.

and grown up with the beasts and the birds who have their home here too. And when the king came hunting with all his merry company, my heart was sad, for that meant death or pain to my dumb friends. If I may ask of you one little thing, then it would be to hunt no more in this sweet forest, and to spare the life of beasts as well as man.'

"These were his last words, lady. He died. His broken-hearted parents laid on me their last curse—that I should meet my death as they did, grieving for a son. Then they lay down upon the pyre of their dead son and burned with him, leaving me all alone, so sad and fearful, that it was many a day before I smiled. And now I die of grief because my Rama has gone away. I cannot see you, I cannot hear your voice; only the sound of someone drawing water from the stream. Give me my bow! I'll shoot straight for the sound. No! I have promised to spare all living things, the birds whose sweet songs fill the trees, the gentle deer,

even the crafty leopard; him, too, will I spare, because I promised Sindhu, the hermit's child."

And so Dasharatha died, keeping faith with the forest boy who loved his dumb companions as dearly as if they had been his brothers and his sisters: perhaps they were, since love makes ties as strong as any that the heart may feel.

This story of Sindhu, the forest boy who loved animals, has been told very beautifully by Toru Dutt, the young Bengali poetess, who herself died quite young not many years ago.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE COMING OF THE BUDDHA

THE great days of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana had long passed away, when a child was born on the border between Kosala (Oudh) and Nepal.

Things had changed since the times of the early Aryans, who were content to graze their flocks, till their land, and attend to the affairs of their villages. Their gods had been bright and happy spirits of the air and sky. The Aryans did not think overmuch about religion, or what would happen to them when they died. They were too busy living and keeping their natural enemies, the Dasyus (dark-skinned people), in order. The Aryans loved pleasure too, and did not think it wrong to enjoy cock-fighting, or to set two fighting rams to butt each other to death. They went on picnics, taking their wives



with them; in the Mahabharata we can read how a party of lords and ladies made an expedition and were amused by watching some dancing.

But as the centuries went by and men grew less simple, they began to trouble themselves about the life after death, and to think that how one lived in this world might make a great deal of difference in the next. They began to think too, that a life made up of eating, drinking and sleeping was not a good preparation for a higher life. And they began to make rules about how to live and the way their gods should be worshipped.

Only the priests knew all the *mantras*, and the way in which they were to be spoken or chanted. And so, as more rites and more *mantras* grew up, the priests became more important. In these days we can see the beginning of what is now called "the caste system." It began with the difference of colour (*varna*) between the fair Aryans and the dark Dasyus.

Later came the four great groups :

- (1) Brahmans; the priests and scholars.
- (2) Kshatriyas; the warriors and landowners.
- (3) Vaisyas; the traders and cultivators.
- (4) Sudras; the labourers, servants, and all people who made things with their hands.

From these four groups all the castes of to-day have branched out. So there grew up groups of families all of which followed the same rules in marriage, food, and religious ceremonies.

No man could escape the caste into which he was born, or marry outside it, nor his son, his daughter, or any member of his family. Only if he were born again was admission into a higher caste possible. There seemed to be no hope for those who were of humble caste, until the coming of the Buddha.

His father was the Raja of Kapilavastu, a Kshatriya of the Sakya tribe. As is the Hindu

custom before the birth of a child, the Raja called in the astrologers, and when these wise men had gazed at the stars and read the omens from their position in the sky, they came to the Raja and told him he would have a son.

This news made the Raja very glad, and he asked the wise men what his son would become.

"Either a great king who will trample down his enemies, or one who will devote himself to a life of self-sacrifice, in which he will free men from ignorance," replied the astrologers.

The Raja was much troubled by the thought that his son might throw off his royalty, for he wished him to become a warrior king, as all his ancestors had been before him.

The child was born, not in his father's palace, but in the grove of Lambini, where afterwards the Emperor Asoka set up a pillar of stone. The mother, who had been on the way to the home of her parents, was taken back with her baby to the



charioteer. This man, who was called Channa, loved his young master better than himself, and often the prince would talk to him and ask him about the outside world. But Channa, like the rest of the palace servants, had heard the Raja's orders, and would speak only of pleasant things.

In this way ten years passed. The prince was now married to his beautiful young cousin, Yasodhara. It seemed as if there were nothing left for him to wish for. But he was not happy. He often longed for the days of his childhood, when in the green silence of the forest he had seemed quite near some wonderful discovery.

If pleasure could not bring peace, what did he lack? Once again he asked Channa about the world that lay outside the palace, and the charioteer replied :

"My lord, the world goes on."

"Like my world?" asked the prince.

"My lord, why do you trouble about these

things?" cried Channa, who feared the Raja's wrath.

"Something in me tells me that I must know about that world outside the palace," said the prince gently, "so, Channa, tell me, are men happy there?"

"Well, no, my lord, not always," replied the charioteer; "suffering and death come to all."

"And will they come to me too?" asked the prince quickly.

"My-lord," replied Channa in distress, "why ask me? You are a great prince, I was speaking of ordinary men."

"I am a man," replied the prince quietly. "Channa, your words have made me sad." And he went away to meditate on what he had heard. His life of luxury now grew hateful to him. All the time he was thinking of that other world and the lot of common men.

The Raja, noticing his changed manner, and

Raja's palace. Seven days later she died, but the baby lived and was called Siddhartha Gautama. Afterwards he became known to all the world as "the Buddha."

He had a happy childhood among the groves and green fields of his home. The town, the palace and the gardens where Gautama played, have long since disappeared. Some say the Raja's palace was built of stone, but most likely it was a wooden building, like the other houses of that time.

The little prince spent nearly all his childhood out of doors. His playmates were the birds and the gentle deer who had their home in the forest. He loved all the animals; they were his real friends, and came to him without fear. The monkeys, leaping from branch to branch, would share their fruit and nuts with him; the timid otter, who hid by day in a hole in the river bank and watched for fish, poked out its snout as the boy ran by.

And he would talk to these creatures, and try to teach them all he himself knew. On fast days he would ask them to set aside their store of fruit or catch of fish in case a poor man came for alms. And, if they did not understand, they loved him, and let him take their food to give to the poor. This, and many other beautiful legends, are told of the Buddha.

But when the Raja saw that his son was full of love and pity, he remembered the prophecy of the wise men. So, fearing lest his son should cease to desire the pleasures of life, he gave orders that no tale of sorrow, pain or death should ever reach him. He commanded also that the prince should never go where he could look on suffering. He provided his son with gay companions and every luxury. The days of the prince were passed in a constant round of pleasure. He had fine clothes, costly jewels, and his own chariot, drawn by two splendid horses. He had his own servant to drive him, his



how he no longer took part in the hunt, or in the chariot races, or in any amusements of the court, sent for the wise men, and said :

“ What shall my son see to make him wish to retire from the world ? ”

“ The four signs,” replied the wise men.

“ What four ? ” demanded the Raja.

“ A cripple, a diseased man, a dead man, and a monk,” was the reply.

“ Let no such person be allowed to come near my son,” commanded the Raja, and he gave orders that guards should be placed round about the palace.

But in spite of this, the prince saw each of the four signs : An aged cripple, another suffering from disease, a corpse, and one who in a yellow robe held out his bowl for alms.

Stricken to the heart, the prince cried out, “ And now I know about that world outside the palace walls. Shame on birth, since to everyone that is born, old age must come.”

Returning to the palace, he was greeted by the news that a son was born to him.

"This," he said quietly, "is a fetter that I shall have to break."

All around him was the sound of rejoicing over the birth of the child. Only the young father was quiet and sad, because he had decided what he ought to do, and it was very difficult for him.

That night he sent for Channa, and told him to saddle the horses. As soon as Channa was gone, the prince went to his wife's room, saying softly to himself, "I will take just one look at my little son."

By the soft light of a lamp fed with fragrant oil he could see Yasodhara, as she lay sleeping on a couch strewn with jasmine. Her hand rested on the baby's head. The prince looked long and tenderly at the wife he loved, and at the son whom he might never see again. Then, with a silent farewell, he stole away.

Outside the palace door, Channa was waiting for him with the horses. Without a word the prince leapt into the saddle and, followed by his faithful servant, galloped away. When he and Channa had ridden many miles, the prince stopped and dismounted. Then he took off all his ornaments, and leading his horse by the bridle said, "Channa, you have served me well. Take back my horse and these, my most precious possessions, to the Raja. Tell him that his son has gone forth to seek the truth."

In vain Channa begged to remain with his master. The prince was firm. "On this journey I must go alone," he said, and turned away.

Very sadly Channa went back to the palace, leading his master's horse, while the prince, taking off his royal dress, put on that of an ascetic, cut off his hair, and with staff and begging-bowl, took the road that led to Gaya.

Some day we shall read how he took up his place



beneath a mighty pipal tree, to be known from that time as the Sacred Bo Tree, or Tree of Wisdom, and how, when he was sitting there, the secret of life seemed to come to him in a flash.

His father had wanted him to be a great king to whom all other things should bow down. And so he was, but he had no throne except a square of hard ground under the shade of a tree; he had no wealth beyond the daily alms placed in his begging-bowl; he had no royal robes, only a beggar's dress; he had no crown except of sorrow, but he won for himself a kingdom beside which the Emperor of the world would have little to show. All mankind, rich and poor, sad or suffering, were his subjects, and his children. He taught the world a new religion of love and pity, and showed to all men the beauty of "Dharma."

He was very old when he died, worn out with work and his long wanderings, but almost his last words to his disciples were, "Be earnest, thoughtful

and pure. He who adheres to Dharma shall make an end of sorrow."

His last day was spent under the shade of some *sal* trees by a river, where he comforted his disciples and told them not to grieve for him. He never claimed for himself any divine rights or pretended to be anything but just a humble monk. But we think of him as one of the greatest souls ever born, and perhaps the greatest of all teachers.

## CHAPTER V

### ALEXANDER THE GREAT

FROM Greece across the Hellespont, across Asia Minor, through Egypt, and eastwards to Babylon marched the Greek army. At their head rode Alexander the Great. Over his light suit of mail he wore a blue cloak. His head was protected by a silver helmet of Persian design, from which a plume of feathers waved in the breeze. He carried a great shield, upon which were engraved heroic scenes from the history of his country.

With him rode his captains. They were all fine men, and richly dressed like their leader. In advance Alexander had sent a party of horsemen, or, as they are called, a body of cavalry. He had also sent a band of mounted archers. Behind him, marching gallantly, came the Greek infantry, or





foot-soldiers. They moved to battle like a wedge, and this formation was called a phalanx. Their shields, placed rim to rim, protected them like the plates of a battleship, and their long spears were the sharp point of the wedge. The foot-soldiers were matched in height and marched in perfect time. Each phalanx moved as one man.

From Babylon they had gone northwards into Afghanistan and on to Bokhara. Before them fled the Persians whom they had routed. Then Alexander turned his army round and went south. Before his eyes rose peak after peak of snow-capped mountains. Beyond those mountains lay Hindustan, and the goal of his long journey. Through the wild passes he led his soldiers, until at last they could look down upon the land they had come to conquer.

When they reached the banks of the Indus, Alexander let his weary troops rest for thirty days. Here, at a place called Ohind, he was met by a

messenger from the King of Taxila, a great city three marches beyond the Indus. This king, who was called Ambhi, wished to be friendly to the Greek general, who he hoped would help him against his enemies. The strongest of these was a king called Poros, who ruled over a kingdom to the east.



Alexander received King Ambhi's messenger kindly; then he said, "I shall want the help of your king to get my army across the river."

"My lord, all will be made quite easy for you," replied the messenger, bowing to the ground.

Spring had now begun. The army, refreshed

by its rest, was ready to go on. One morning, just as day was breaking, men and horses crossed the river by a bridge made of boats, and by the help of the friendly King Ambhi, marched into India.

As Alexander and his army came near to Taxila, they were surprised to see a strong force of Indian soldiers coming towards them.

On guard in a moment, Alexander cried out, "We are betrayed!" and gave orders for the attack. But just at that moment King Ambhi himself galloped up with only a few attendants.

Greeting the Greek commander, he said, "Here comes my army, which is ready to fight for you."

This pleased Alexander very much. He could see that King Ambhi's soldiers were fine big men, just as the soldiers of the Punjab are to-day. He thanked King Ambhi, who, turning his horse, rode beside Alexander into Taxila; there the Greeks were entertained with great splendour.

To-day the Great Trunk Road and the North-

Western Railway have taken the place of the ancient highway along which the Greeks marched into India, but twenty miles to the north of Rawalpindi, some remains of the great city of Taxila can still be seen. When Alexander entered it with King Ambhi, it was a beautiful city built in a pleasant green valley. It had a university, to which the sons of kings and princes as well as those of Brahmans came to study. They must have felt surprised when the Greeks came marching in; those fair men, dressed in short tunics, who carried long spears and great shields of a pattern never before seen in India. The Greeks were certainly surprised at much they saw in this strange new country, but they all agreed that the men were brave and strong and splendid fighters.

In return for his hospitality and kindness, Alexander gave King Ambhi fine presents and a large sum of money, and promised to help him against the powerful King Poros. To King Poros

Alexander sent a summons, saying, "Come and pay me homage and tribute," which meant that he expected the Indian king to bow before him and bring him treasure.

King Poros returned a very proud answer :

"I will not pay homage or tribute to you. But I will come to my frontier, at the head of my army, and fight."

"What kind of a man is this Poros who returns me such a brave answer?" asked Alexander:

"A great man, my lord, mighty among kings, and so broad that when he is seated on an elephant the beast looks no larger than a horse," was King Ambhi's reply.

"And how large is his army?" continued Alexander.

"A mighty force," replied the king; "two hundred fighting elephants guard the centre, while to the left and right three hundred chariots are supported by four thousand cavalry."

"How many foot soldiers has this Poros?" asked Alexander.

"Thirty thousand at least," said the king.

"That is an army worth meeting!" cried Alexander. "And as to King Poros, well, I like a brave man, be he friend or foe."

The hot season was at its height when the Greek army left Taxila and marched towards the river Jhelum, upon the farther bank of which the army of King Poros was encamped.

It was early in May, and when Alexander reached the river he found it in full flood, for the snow had melted in the hills. The boats which the Greeks had used to cross the Indus had been cut into sections and brought on wagons. They were now rebuilt. But the passage of the flooded Jhelum was no easy matter. On the opposite bank the army of Poros waited. The king himself, looking like a great figure of bronze, and mounted on his war-elephant, surveyed the foe.

Alexander knew he would never get his horses across the river so long as the elephants were there; for guards posted by the Indian king watched every movement in the Greek camp. Alexander decided to steal a passage higher up the river and surprise the Indian army in the rear. Some commanders would have waited until the rains were over and the waters of the river sank. This would make the crossing much easier. Alexander gave out that this is what he meant to do. But it was only a trick to deceive the enemy. All the time he was searching for a place to cross. At last he found it. Rafts and smaller boats were made in secret and hidden away in the woods farther up the river.

By this time the monsoon had broken in full fury. The floods were at their height. In violent storms of wind and rain, Alexander marched a picked force up the river bank during the night. Reaching a point where the river took a sharp bend, he found his fleet of light boats ready. So silently

had Alexander managed the whole affair, that the first thing the Indians saw was the Greek boats in the river just below them. Too late they realized that Alexander had almost made the passage. A small force was hurriedly sent off to meet the invaders. It was cut to pieces. The bad news was carried to King Poros. He moved out with his great army, while his elephants trumpeted loudly, as if to defy the white men.

With their shields shining like discs of silver, and their long spears like a field of wheat, Alexander's foot-soldiers advanced in perfect order. The Greek cavalry galloped up the slippery river bank to attack, as swiftly as a flight of birds. In front of the elephants a body of Indian foot-soldiers broke at the charge, and turning fled towards the elephants. The great beasts, charging with a roar, tramped down both Greeks and Indians in their mad rush.

Like a flash of lightning, two regiments of



Alexander's cavalry swept past, and galloping up behind the Indian army, threw the whole force into confusion. Elephants, chariots, horses and men were all mixed up together, while Alexander pressed his attack, until the enemy was routed.

King Poros himself fought like a lion, until he was so badly wounded that he fainted from loss of blood. He was taken prisoner, and brought before his conqueror.

"What would you ask of me?" inquired Alexander gently, for he loved a brave man, whether friend or foe.

"To be treated as a king," replied Poros proudly.

"But is there no favour that you ask for yourself?" continued Alexander.

"To be treated as a king covers everything," answered Poros.

"Keep your country and your crown; and call Alexander of Macedon friend," cried Alexander.

And he restored to Poros all that he had lost, and gave him fresh land.

In this way he made a firm ally of the Indian king, whom he left in charge of his affairs, while he himself with what was left of his gallant army set off to conquer fresh kingdoms. He got as far as the river Bias, but then had to turn back because his soldiers would not follow him farther.

It was about this time that he met a young warrior called Chandragupta, a member of the Maurya family. Chandragupta was an exile from his country, from which he had fled in disgrace with his Guru, a learned Brahman called Chanakya, or sometimes Kautilya.

When Alexander was forced to leave India, Chandragupta seized the chance of putting himself into power. Advised and helped by the wily Chanakya, he drove out the few Greeks remaining, subdued the small kingdoms, and built for himself that great empire of which Alexander had dreamed.

Alexander, after a voyage down the Indus and a terrible march along the coast to the west, reached Babylon. There he died, aged thirty-three, one of the greatest commanders in the history of the world. Chandragupta, whose power grew steadily until his dominions included nearly the whole of India, ruled for many years, with Chanakya as his Prime Minister. He was succeeded by his son, Bindusara, the father of Asoka the Great.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE PILLARS OF ASOKA

THERE is a story that the Buddha was one day walking along a village street with his begging-bowl in his hand, when he saw a group of children busy making mud castles.

All of them except one ran forward to put some small offering in the bowl. But the smallest of the boys hung back, for he had nothing to give. Then, ashamed to be different from his friends, he ran forward and thrust a lump of mud into the bowl. Then he would have hidden from the eyes of the kind old man, but the Buddha called him, and placing a hand on his head said, "This boy, who has given what he had, will some day be a great king."

Three hundred years later a boy was born who

was to become the greatest king India had ever known. This was Asoka, and he is remembered as "The Builder," for to this day can be seen the great pillars of stone on which are inscribed the Edicts of Asoka. We shall see just why he set them up.

Before his time men, even kings, had lived in wooden houses, and those who were very poor had to be content with huts of mud and stone. Some lived in caves, great holes in the side of the hills, where wild animals hid their young. Hermits and holy men quite often had no better home than a cave, dark as night except for a torch of wood, or a fire lit on the floor. It is not known just when the first stone was cut and polished to be used in building. Bricks were in use as foundations for the houses of wood. But the beautiful temples and bridges, the forts and great walls which still stand to-day, these were built much later. Asoka was the first king in India to build in stone. And he



built in memory of the Buddha, whose story we have read, and whose disciple he became.

He built not only great pillars upon which he caused to be inscribed his edicts or laws, but he built great monasteries—houses where Buddhist priests could live and study. In these monasteries, hundreds of monks lived together, and when they were “instructed”—that is, when they had learned enough about their religion to be able to carry its message to others—they set out as teachers, or what we should now call missionaries.

Carrying nothing but a wooden bowl for alms and a staff, these Buddhist monks walked all over India preaching to the wondering people the law of the Buddha. Some crossed the sea, others braved the terrors of the ice-bound passes, for how else could the good tidings have reached such far distant places as China and Japan, as well as Burma and Ceylon?

The Emperor Asoka himself preached to the people, and it was mainly through him that the



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beautiful teaching of the Buddha became the religion of his people. Even the kings of other countries laid down their swords and forsook war. And some sent their wise men to study in the monasteries which Asoka had built, and to find out the secret of the peace which had fallen upon India. For India was at peace. One great war only was fought in the name of Asoka, and it had caused him bitter sorrow, for he never could forget the cries of the widows and the fatherless of the conquered people of Kalinga. Hereafter all his ways were those of peace. He preached and practised *ahimsa*, and his subjects were taught to practise it too.

Because there was peace in the land, men dared to sow their crops, and to look forward to the reaping when the grain was ripe. No longer would the great war chariots come thundering over the newly sown land. No longer would a hungry army eat up the poor man's store; no longer would

the king be the first and fiercest warrior in the land. The good King Asoka carried no sword, and went on foot carrying a message of hope and love to his subjects.

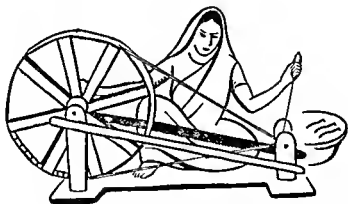
And now the potter's wheel was heard again. Outside the entrance of the village street he sat, moulding the clay with his hands. Every pretty thought that came into his mind he put on the pot he was making. A flight of birds, a herd of deer, maidens dancing in a ring, or some grand warrior in full armour might decorate the vessel he was making. Though only of low caste, the potter



was not below the notice of the Buddha, who loved all men as equals and brothers. Neither was he beneath the notice of the great Asoka, whose humblest subject was one with him if he had learned the lesson of *ahimsa*. And so the potter plied his trade, happier than any potter that had lived before him, for when men gain self-respect their gifts grow bright. In this way the time of Asoka was a time of great progress for the people.

As the potter worked, the women sang while they spun fine thread into delicate rolls of muslin, or a coarser thread into a cloth which we now call *khaddar*. Hundreds of years before cotton goods were seen in England the people of India could spin and weave them with great skill. So fine was some of the muslin that two hundred and fifty miles of thread was used to make a pound of material. But in those days the people had plenty of time, and were content to work for very small pay. This they could do because their food was cheap, and

because they wanted so little. They never left their own town or village, and the sons followed the trades of their fathers, for generation after generation. That is why each craft was brought to such a high pitch of excellence. A child was born to be a potter or a weaver or a basket-maker or a



stone mason, or even a shoemaker. From a baby he watched his father doing his work. The potter's child would hand the wet clay to the man at the wheel, or stare at the design which his father was tracing on the finished vase. The weaver's son would hold the thread, or even take a part in the

work of arranging the thread on a row of reeds which stood under a tree near the family dwelling. He could not play with the children of the potter, for although the new religion taught that all men were equal, the potter was still obliged to sit outside the village. But at marriages he was employed to beat the big drum, which was as ancient as his trade. Both were mentioned in the Ramayana, which the potter and his children knew by heart. So did the weaver and his children, and the basket-maker and his children. Even the great Āsoka himself had heard from his mother the story of Rama and Sita, though he loved better the tales of the Buddha and the legends of his many births. These were all brought together in books called the Jataka, which we may read to this day.

From all we can learn, the days of the good King Asoka were happy ones for rich and poor, great and small, and it is sad to think that when the "great builder" died all was changed, and

darkness fell on India. But his beautiful palace still stood, a building of such grandeur that a Chinese pilgrim seeing it some hundreds of years later, thought that it had been built by fairies. His great pillars stood too, to teach all men the right way to live. But those who came after him forgot the wise old king, forgot the teaching of the Buddha. Out sprang the sword. The frightened people no longer worked at wheel or loom in peace and happiness. Things that were priceless were broken. The work of a great life was almost wiped out. Kings made war one upon the other. Green crops were trampled down, and men sowed their seed in vain. War had come again, and all good things withered. But still the pillars of Asoka stood, as some of them still stand to-day. For he built not of wood but of stone.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE GOLDEN AGE OF INDIA

THERE is a time of which we speak as "The Golden Age of India," because during it the Hindus lived at peace under the rule of Hindu kings. Some of the greatest of Hindus were born in this age. By some it is called "The Golden Age of the Guptas" because the kings who reigned then were of Gupta stock. The first of them, a Raja of Magadha (Bihar) founded the Gupta era.

He had the famous name of Chandragupta and married a princess of a warrior family called the Lichchhavis, who had been great chiefs in the days of the Buddha, eight hundred years before. This princess, whose name was Kumara Devi, was the mother of Samudragupta, one of the finest kings who ever lived in India. Soldier, poet, and states-

man, he was not, like Asoka, a Buddhist. He worshipped Vishnu, and like the shepherd-god of Brindaban, played most sweetly on the flute. When he had died after a long and glorious reign, his empire—the greatest in India since the days of Asoka—stretched from the foot of the Himalayas in the north to the Narbada in the south.

The next Gupta king was Chandragupta II, who took the name of Vikramaditya, Sun of Power. It was to his court that the Chinese pilgrims Fa Hien and Sing-Cheng came. From the beginning of the fifth century, pilgrims from China had braved the perils of the journey across the desert and over the snowy mountains. There was no good road over these mountains, only narrow tracks, like those made by cattle. Only men who were very strong could ever hope to reach India. Many of the pilgrims died on the way, but Fa Hien and Sing-Cheng struggled on, and one day they were rewarded by being able to



look down on the plains of India which lay golden in the sunshine.

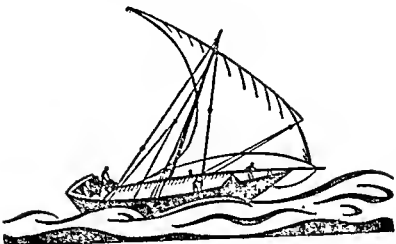
"I am sitting in the garden of King Chandragupta under the pleasant shade of a Bodhi tree," writes Sing-Cheng to a much-loved friend in China. But the pilgrim was not using a pen and ink as we do to-day, or even tracing the words on silk with a brush in ancient Chinese fashion. He was scratching on a dry palm leaf with a pointed instrument of metal, called a style. In spite of the time it took to make every word, Sing-Cheng managed to write his absent friend a very long letter, in which he described all he saw during his stay in India. He speaks of the king as being a very learned man, and tells us how the people bowed to Vikramaditya's judgment seat. Fa Hien also wrote about his visit to India, but he was so busy searching for Buddhist texts that he has not nearly so much to say about the king as Sing-Cheng. The sight that caused most wonder



to Fa Hien was the palace at Pataliputra, which had been built by Asoka. He says that it looked far more like the work of spirits than of human beings.

Sing-Cheng describes the king as being a tall man with a broad forehead, keen eyes and a firm mouth. At first the pilgrim felt very frightened of him, when suddenly Vikramaditya smiled. Then his whole face was lit up with kindness and good humour.

Both Fa Hien and Sing-Cheng speak of the content and prosperity of the people under the Gupta rule. They mention hospitals and almshouses, rest-houses for travellers, and, of course, the beautiful Buddhist temples which they had come so far to see. At the end of his letter Sing-Cheng tells his friend that he does not mean to return to China by land. He has discovered that it is possible to go by sea from the most southern point in India. A voyage from India to China in the fifth century



took at least three years, and was full of dangers, not only from storms, but because a passenger-ship might easily be attacked by pirates. Only a hundred years ago, Sir Jamsetjee Jijibhoy, the Parsee merchant-prince, went as a young man from Bombay to China. The ship on which he took passage was taken prisoner, and he, with the rest of the passengers, had a very bad time. But in spite of the dangers from wind and wave and pirates, Sing-Cheng could not face the idea of returning over the mountains and across the desert. So he went back

by sea, and so did Fa Hien. And they must have got safely back to China; certainly Fa Hien did, though he had some strange and uncomfortable adventures before he landed in his own beloved land.

But our knowledge of the beauty and brilliance of the Gupta courts, especially that of Vikramaditya, does not depend entirely upon the writings of Chinese pilgrims. Great writers of the time, such as Kalidasa, the author of *Sakuntala*, reflect the glory of the Golden Age.

Kalidasa was one of the "Nine Gems" of Vikramaditya's court. He took the story of *Sakuntala* from the *Mahabharata* and made it into a play. It still remains one of the great dramas of the world, and has been translated into almost every language. A little while ago it was acted in England with great success.

Vikramaditya was followed by several other kings. Then the Golden Age began to fade.

Darkness fell upon Northern India, until, early in the seventh century, a boy succeeded to his father's kingdom of Thanesar. This boy was called Harsha, and at the age of sixteen he became a king. He came to the throne through sorrow, for in a few short weeks he had lost father, mother, and his dearly loved elder brother, Rajyavardhana. All that was left to him was his sister Rajyasri, and she was a widow, and a prisoner in the hands of the king who had murdered her husband. She escaped with a few faithful servants and her women to the Vindhya forests, and here, just as she was about to become *sati*, her devoted brother found her.

We can read the whole story as set down by the Brahman poet Bana, who was a friend of King Harsha and lived at his court. From Bana, too, we can make a picture of the country and the people, and of the habits and customs of early Hindu India.

Bana called his work the "Harsha Charita," or "Life of King Harsha." But it comes to an end

just as the gallant young king rescues his sister from the fire. He is led to the spot by a forest hermit, and overhears Rajyasri's lament :

“ O holy Yama, come quickly—where are you, O goddess of our family? . . . O Mother forest, do you not hear the cries of this distressed daughter? O Sun, save this devoted wife, helpless in her misery.”

Then the princess calls upon her dead father, mother, and elder brother, and then on Harsha :

“ O brother wind, hasten to tell the King Harsha that the princess is burning, he is the consoler of all who are in trouble.”

Someone speaks Harsha's name. The princess, almost fainting, sees the royal umbrella through the trees, and cries out :

“ O Queen, you are indeed happy in the coming of King Harsha.”

She is saved, and by the brother she loves best in all the world. But she still longs to join her

husband, and is only persuaded to live by the words of the old hermit, who tells her it is her duty to return to Kanauj with the king. They leave the forest together, King Harsha and his sister. The story of Bana is ended, but Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, takes up the tale.

Like Fa Hien and Ching-Seng, Hiuen Tsang undertook the long and dangerous journey from China to India, in search of Buddhist records. From him we find out that Harsha had won for himself a great empire. He never conquered the south, for though he went in person with a great army, accompanied by his most distinguished generals, he was defeated by Pulakesin, King of the Deccan. Harsha was forced to retire behind the Narbada, which remained his boundary on the south.

Although he lived a long time after the Golden Age of the Guptas, Harsha made a Golden Age of his own. Everything about him was golden.



Even his travelling chariot was hung about with golden bells. When he went upon one of his royal tours through his dominions, he moved in great state. Several hundred drummers went with him, carrying drums of gold, upon which a note was beaten for each step taken. No other king except



Harsha was allowed the use of these "music pace drums." And when they heard the sound of the drums the people would say, "Our good King Harsha is coming," for Harsha was a great law-giver.

In those days tents had not been invented, and so Harsha had a travelling palace made of reeds and

boughs. This was built at every place where the king stopped, and was burnt when he left. And so, to the sound of golden drums and to the tinkle of golden bells, this golden king moved through his kingdom. There were those who remembered having seen him mounted upon a splendid elephant,



with a great army marching behind him. There were those who remembered the wedding of his sister, the Princess Rajyasri, and the coming of her bridegroom, the young King of Kanauj.

## THE COMING OF THE BRIDEGROOM

Then, true to his time, the bridegroom came. Before him ran footmen, waving red chowries studded with gold. Troops of horses and elephants, decorated with gold trappings and jingling bells, appeared on the horizon.

He came mounted on an elephant, whose nose ornament was a string of pearls. All about him his minstrels danced and sang. A number of lamps burning scented oil gave out a golden light. His head with its top-knot of flowers, set in the middle of a jasmine wreath, was more beautiful than the moon and its halo. He had made for himself a cloak of flowers, and looked like some heavenly being come down to earth.

On his arrival at the gate, the king and his sons, accompanied by a royal escort, went out on foot to meet him. Dismounting, he bowed, and the king with outstretched arms gave him a hearty



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